

# 320 MS boasts BMX champion

## Warren officer leads double life

**1st Lt. Joe Tobin**  
*320th Missile Squadron*

The Air Force is full of people who have come from all walks of life and many different backgrounds. Just conversing with your coworkers or striking up a conversation at the barbershop can reveal many interesting facts about people who may appear “ordinary.” Talk with 1st Lt. Drew Downey, a missileer from the 320th Missile Squadron for just five minutes and you’ll soon realize that he’s anything but “ordinary.” In fact, Lieutenant Downey is the two-time defending American Bicycle Association Champion, as well as the 2004 National and World Bicycle

Association Champion.

Lieutenant Downey grew up in the Philadelphia area, and just like most kids his age, loved to ride his bike. His passion for riding blossomed in 1985, when, at age 13, a neighbor introduced him to the world of BMX racing. Soon after, he was competing on the local and state circuit.

BMX racing is a mixture of strength conditioning and endurance training. In fact, it is estimated that one lap around a BMX track is equivalent to a five mile run. Timing and technical riding experience is also important. The first rider out of the gate usually dictates the tempo of the race and also gets to pick his line on the track. A fearless desire to win is a

must. Racing around a track against eight men in a race and as many as forty other competitors can get very physical, so crashes are the norm. Add all this to a bunch of dirt jumps, table-tops, and banked turns, and you’re a BMX racer.

In 1995, after ten years of amateur racing, Lieutenant Downey became a professional rider on the National Bicycle Association and the American Bicycle Association circuit. Making the jump from amateur to pro requires complete dedication; it is a full time job requiring travel across the nation and a variety of countries. In fact, the sport has grown so much in the past 20 years that it has grabbed the attention of the Olympic committee and was added to the 2008 Olympics scheduled to be held Beijing, China. The ranking system is much like Nascar racing; the better you place, the more points you earn. Pros and amateurs can com-



Courtesy photos provided by 1st Lt. Drew Downey

*First Lt. Drew Downey, 320th Missile Squadron missileer, (number 1 in the center) is the current American Bicycle Champion and the 2004 National and World Bicycle Association Champion.*

pete in the same race for money, called a ProAm, but the big bucks are in the pro class where travel expenses and entry fees are paid by the sponsors. At the 2004



Photo by 1st Lt. Darrick Lee

*In addition to his duties as a missileer, 1st Lt. Drew Downey, 320th Missile Squadron, is a professional BMX champion.*

Grand National held in Louisville, Ky., the top pro took home a check worth \$10,000. The better the rider, the better the spon-

sorship and support. Lieutenant Downey’s sponsors have been names such as Vans, Oakley, Fox, Yamaha, Redman, No Fear, Maxxis, Troy Lee and Adidas. He has also been seen in some of the more prolific magazines, “BMX Plus” and “Transworld BMX.”

Just a year after becoming pro, Lieutenant Downey decided to enlist into the Air Force as a civil engineer troop. He deployed to Jordan where he was responsible for the construction of training facilities for the Jordanian troops. Since he was no longer able to keep his professional status, he was forced to revert back to amateur until he returned to the United States where he could race again. In the spring of 2001, he decided to advance his Air Force career and joined the ROTC program while enrolled at Arizona State University, where he studied business administration. After two years, Lieutenant Downey earned his bachelor’s degree, as well as a commission into the United States Air Force. Shortly thereafter, Lieutenant Downey was trained as a space and missile officer. He decided on an Air Force career out of an overwhelming desire to serve his country.

Lieutenant Downey’s goals are to balance both careers as a professional Air Force officer and a BMX racer. With the help of his wife they are able to accomplish this hectic schedule of balance between both careers. He relies heavily on his wife for her support in his training and race schedule.

Training consists of squats, cardio conditioning, and timing techniques out of the



gate, which is similar to the starting lights at a drag racing event. On the military side, Lieutenant Downey prepares for his job with two classroom-training days and a training day in the simulator. He also pulls eight 24-hour alerts a month and other various required events. He does this with the help of the scheduling office and support of his squadron commander. Planning ahead has enabled Lieutenant Downey to go to his leadership with the days he needs off in advance, enabling the scheduler to accommodate him while still focusing on the mission.

Both passions have complimented each other. The Air Force has given him the opportunity to compete against the best riders in the local area, which makes him a more diverse rider. Competing has complimented his Air Force career by being physically serving as advertisement for the Air Force.

Lieutenant Downey is proof we all have a story and none of us is really “ordinary.”

